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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: BREAKFAST WITH SECRETARY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
ABERTO ROMULO

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11. (SBU) Summary: At a private breakfast on September 3, Secretary of Foreign Affairs Romulo told me that the

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Philippines shares our concerns over the situation in Burma. The Philippine government is concerned about the recent crackdown, feels the Burmese potential "new constitution" is a sham, and does not believe that Burma is moving in a positive direction in terms of allowing a legitimate opposition. On the DPRK Romulo praised continuing progress in the Six-Party talks. On U.S.-Philippine issues, Romulo praised U.S. development assistance in Mindanao, saying the USG is making a tangible difference in people's lives. He is pushing Philippine negotiators to accelerate progress in peace talks with Muslim insurgent groups, saying that the combination of "soft" and "hard" power used by the Philippine Government is proving effective. When he sees Secretary Rice in Sydney at the APEC meeting, he will convey hopes that she will visit the Philippines later this year and travel to Mindanao to see the progress being made against terrorism with the strong support of the United States. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alberto Romulo came to my residence for a relaxed private breakfast on September 3, a day prior to his departure for the APEC meetings in Sydney, Australia. Romulo had just returned from joining Philippine President Arroyo at events marking the 50th Independence of Malaysia where he said the Philippine President thanked her Malaysian counterpart for their continuing role as facilitator for peace talks between the Government of the Philippines and the Muslim insurgent group, the Moro Independent Liberation Front (MILF). The week before, Romulo had been in Brazil for meetings between Asian and Latin American countries. He said he felt that the two regions had drifted apart in recent years, despite strong Spanish heritage in the Philippines. He was surprised at the vehement comments of the Venezuelan Foreign Minister against the United States and said that the strong and "rude" public commentary was surprising to the Asian attendees.

BURMA

13. (SBU) We talked about Burma's recent crackdown on pro-democracy activists and Burma's National Convention to develop a new constitution. Romulo characterized the new constitution effort as a "total sham" noting that it offered no voice and no role for opposition. Romulo said he could not imagine any of our nations voicing support for anything short of meaningful progress toward democracy. He noted

recent statements by Mrs. Bush as well as ASEAN's continuing efforts to try and promote democracy in Burma, saying he felt that the Burmese regime simply ignored all our efforts. I pointed out the importance of international efforts to pressure the regime and said we must all resist any efforts to imply that such meaningless steps as the "new" constitution represented genuine progress. Romulo said he would look forward to talking about developments in Burma with Secretary Rice on the margins of the upcoming APEC meetings in Sydney.

SECRETARY RICE - ROMULO MEETING IN SYDNEY

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14. (SBU) In addition to talking to the Secretary about Burma, Romulo said he would hope to hear the Secretary's thoughts on next steps in the Six-Party talks with North Korea. He applauded the progress made thus far and praised U.S. leadership of this important process. He told me he'd hope to update the Secretary on the progress the Philippines was making toward bringing peace to Mindanao in the southern Philippines. He highlighted the combination of "soft" and "hard" power blending development with the tough fight being waged by the Armed Forces of the Philippines against terrorists as an emerging success story. He said that U.S. development assistance was directly helping bring the benefits of peace to "real people," turning away support for terrorists and building a foundation for prosperity. He said he hoped that Secretary Rice would be able to visit the Philippines before the end of this year to see personally the impact of U.S. assistance in Mindanao in fighting terrorism as well as how genuinely fond of Americans Filipinos throughout the country are. I said that I knew the Secretary would like to visit but highlighted the many competing demands for her time. Romulo said he would also hope to share with the Secretary his thoughts on the growing economic successes, to include a recent USD \$1 billion investment by U.S. firm Texas Instruments, and discuss the Philippines' desire to be a Millenium Challenge Compact country.

ARREST OF TERRORIST GROUP LEADER, JOSE MARIA SISON

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15. (SBU) Romulo was elated by the recent arrest by Dutch authorities of Jose Maria Sison, the longtime self-exiled leader of the Communist New People's Army, a group on the U.S. list of Foreign Terrorist organizations. He said he and Cabinet colleagues had been working with the Dutch for several years to make sure the case they built was good. They were delighted to finally have Sison behind bars. Romulo said that given the U.S. interest in prosecuting terrorists, he hoped we'd be prepared to assist the Dutch with the case, if the Dutch so requested.

TRAVEL BY SENIOR PHILIPPINE OFFICIALS

16. (SBU) Romulo told me it was unlikely that Philippine President Arroyo would travel to New York for the UNGA in September. He said he would attend the UNGA, stopping first in Washington on September 24. While in Washington, he'd hope to see members of the U.S. Congress. Recognizing that he would have just seen Secretary Rice in Sydney, Romulo said he'd like to call on Deputy Secretary Negroponte, if schedules permitted.
KENNEY